

126. *The Want of Labourers in the Gospel Harvest,*
considered and improved:

IN A
S E R M O N

PREACHED JULY 30; 1775;

ON OCCASION OF THE MUCH LAMENTED

D E A T H

O F T H E

REVEREND AND LEARNED

CALEB ASHWORTH, D.D.

TUTOR of the DISSENTING ACADEMY
at *Daventry in Northamptonshire.*

To which is added,

A POSTSCRIPT, containing some Hints; with a View to
the Interest of Religion among the DISSENTERS.

Whom shall I send? and who will go for us?

Isaiah vi. 8.

BY SAMUEL PALMER.

L O N D O N :

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P R E F A C E.

THE following Sermon would not have appeared, especially so long after the event which occasioned it, had it not been desired by several friends of the Deceased and the Author; in order, in some measure, to supply the want of a much better, preached to the Congregation at Daventry, by the Doctor's worthy Successor; who for reasons of which he himself can give the best account, hath, after long deliberation, determined not to print it. The Author's desire that some public testimony of respect might be borne to the memory of so considerable a man as Dr. Ashworth, peculiarly endeared to himself as his Tutor and his Friend, overcame some objections which he otherwise should have had against this publication: And the more easily, as he hoped that, on account of the subject, it was calculated to do some good: An hope which he was the more willing to indulge, as several ministers who heard the substance of it, upon another occasion, had urged the printing of it with this view. If that great end should in any degree be answered, the Author will be content to bear any censures, to which he may be exposed, either from the faults of the composition, or the freedom used in handling the subject.

It is proper here to apprise the Reader of some expressions which, being used in the delivery of the Sermon, are here retained, respecting the difficulty of providing a successor to the Doctor, which might otherwise seem destitute of propriety; since (through the remarkable and unexpected appearance of providence) one * hath accepted the office, who is in every view qualified to execute it, so as to give the fullest satisfaction to all concerned.

It will probably be a disappointment to many readers that so little is said of Dr. Ashworth's character. It will be sufficient to observe, in excuse for this defect, that he himself desired no character might be given of him. But if it had not been for this prohibition, nothing more needed to have been said, than that he was the immediate successor of the illustrious Dr. Doddridge, and was nominated by him to this office.

* The Rev. Mr. THOMAS ROBINS, late of West-Bromwich.

TO
THE STUDENTS
IN THE ACADEMY AT DAVENTRY,

Lately under the Care of the Rev. Dr. ASHWORTH,

IN TESTIMONY OF
THE MOST FERVENT WISHES FOR THE PROSPERITY
OF THAT RESPECTABLE SEMINARY OF LEARNING,
AND THEIR BEST IMPROVEMENT
IN EVERY BRANCH OF USEFUL SCIENCE,
AND OF EVANGELICAL RELIGION,
BY WHICH THEY MAY BE QUALIFIED
TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF SKILFUL, LABORIOUS,
AND SUCCESSFUL LABOURERS IN THE
REDEEMER'S HARVEST,

THIS DISCOURSE IS DEDICATED

BY

THEIR MOST AFFECTIONATE FRIEND

AND MOST OBEDIENT SERVANT,



THE AUTHOR.

Hackney;
Oct. 2. 1775.

LUKE X. 2.

The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.

WHATEVER there was peculiar in the state of the world, and of Christianity in it, when our Lord addressed these words to his Disciples, it must be allowed, that the similarity between that time and the present, is sufficient to justify the application of this address to ourselves. The number of Christ's Ministers, when he first recommended to them this prayer, was indeed very inconsiderable, consisting only of Twelve †. However, he saw occasion again to recommend it, when the number had received the addition of the seventy Disciples. And tho', in the present day, it is far more numerous, their work is so arduous, and the field of their labour so extensive, that there is sufficient reason for all the Ministers, and the true friends of Jesus, frequently and fervently to unite in the same request.

† Matt. ix. 37, 38. x. 1.

A Society of Christians, who, by the nature of their profession, are supposed to have at heart the interest of Jesus Christ in the world, can at no time, be unseasonably urged, to pray for it's support and increase. But, if such a subject as this may be more properly insisted upon at one time than at another, it is surely on such an occasion as that which I have now in my view: The death of one, who was not only himself an useful labourer in the Lord's harvest, but who was eminently qualified, to form others for the same office: one who had been instrumental in training up many for it, and might have been expected to have continued a blessing to the Church, in both these respects, for years to come †.

The loss of such a man must be great, and will be felt, far beyond the limits of a particular church or neighbourhood; and there are none, of any party or persuasion, of a truly public spirit, who were acquainted with his worth, (as several of you were), but must lay it to heart. I need not, therefore, apologize to you, tho' at so great a distance from the chief scene of his labours, for indulging a few reflections on this melancholy event; which I would do, not merely as a testimony of that respect, which I owed him as my tutor, much less as a panegyric on his character, but with a view, to assist us all, who wish well to the cause of our

† The Doctor was but 53 years of age, and had naturally a strong constitution; which he, doubtless, greatly injured by a too intense application to study; especially, when he first undertook the care of the academy. He died July 18.

common Lord, in the best improvement of an event, which may seem greatly detrimental to it. The following particulars, which the text contains, may in this view, by the divine blessing, be profitably considered.

- I. The view therein given of the Gospel dispensation: it is the Redeemer's HARVEST.
- II. An important consideration relating to it: *The Harvest truly is GREAT.*
- III. A melancholy account of the scarcity of persons to gather it in: *The labourers are FEW.*
- IV. An exhortation hereupon addressed to the Disciples: viz. *To pray to the Lord of the harvest, TO INCREASE their number.*

These particulars we shall consider, not as applicable to the times of our Saviour, and his Apostles only, but also to our own,

- I. Let us attend a little to the figurative representation which the text gives us of the Gospel dispensation; as *the HARVEST of our REDEEMER.*

In the month of Harvest, the husband-man reaps the fruits of his labours through all the other parts of the year. The corn, which he had sown, and cultivated with care, is gathered into the

garner; the ample reward of his toil. This world of ours may be compared to a large field, and mankind who inhabit it to crops of grain. This similitude our Saviour uses in that parable of his, *Matthew xiii.* where he speaks of the LAST DAY as the Harvest; when he, the great husbandman, *shall separate the wheat from the tares.* In the text, he evidently refers to that period of time, which began with the preaching of the glad tidings of salvation, and will end at the consummation of all things. This is the blessed season, in which he reaps the fruits of his labour and toil, by gathering out of the wide field of this degenerate world, immortal souls into his church.

An Harvest supposes a previous SEED TIME, and the indefatigable diligence of the husbandman in plowing, sowing, and cultivating his field. Such preparation was there, previous to the Gospel-harvest. The former dispensations of God to the world, may be considered, as the seed-time of our great Redeemer. A way had been gradually preparing, ever since the fall, for the promulgation of the Gospel of Salvation; and under the Jewish dispensation, many important steps were taken towards it. Many prophets were sent, from time to time, to till the field, to cleanse the soil, to prepare the earth for the reception of the good seed, to remove out of the way, whatever tended to hinder its growth. Very favourable seasons were afforded for the springing up, and the growth of the tender blade.

At

At length, "the Jewish wintry † state" drew to an end; *the rains were over and gone, the flowers appeared on the earth, the time of the singing of birds came, the voice of the turtle was heard, "to* "proclaim the new, the joyful year." *The sun of righteousness ‡ then arose in his full strength, to bring the crop to maturity. || John the Baptist was sent as the fore-runner of our Lord, and his coming contributed much to forward the great design of the Gospel. He was sent, we are told, to prepare the way of the Lord, and to make ready a people prepared for him §. And from the time, that John's ministry commenced, it is said, 'the kingdom of God was preached, and every* 'man pressed into it ||.' At length, the great husband-man himself appeared, *when the fulness of time was come, to gather in the first-fruits of the harvest, which was now fully ripe. You find our Saviour speaking with pleasure, in the same figurative language, of the promising appearances of success attending the preaching of his Gospel. Upon observing the disposition of the Samaritans to receive it, on the report of their town's-woman, whom he had made the subject of his grace; (when probably he saw them flocking in great multitudes over the corn-fields, to hear the glad-tidings) Say not, says he, there are four months, and then cometh the harvest; behold I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, for they are white already to the harvest. Now was the time*

† WATTS's Hymn on Cantic. ii. 11, &c.

‡ Mal. iv. 2.

§ Luke i. 17.

|| Luke xvi. 16.

for him to send forth his labourers to reap. Now was the happy period arrived, to which the ancient prophecies referred, that *to him should the gathering of the people be* *.

That joyful season, blessed be God, is not yet over: It still continues, and will continue till the end of time: till all *God's elect that are scattered in the different parts of the world, shall be gathered in*. Still the Saviour is sending forth his Ministers among Us, to bring sinful dying men to himself, that they may be delivered from that universal destruction, which shall e'er long come upon the ungodly; who, he himself says, *shall be burned as tares and chaff in the unquenchable fire*. Now is the accepted time; Behold, now is the day of Salvation! God forbid, that any of you, by trifling away the precious opportunity, should have occasion, at last, to adopt the melancholy reflection, *The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved* †! With what earnestness should we, the Ministers of Jesus, exert ourselves to prevent this? Many considerations concur to recommend this to us, and among others, what we are now to observe:

II. That important circumstance, of which our Lord reminds his Disciples, viz. *That the harvest truly is GREAT*,

By this he doubtless intended—that there was much work for his Ministers to do,—and much opportunity and encouragement for doing it.

* Gen. xlix. 10.

† Jer. viii. 20.

1. When our Lord told his ministers that the harvest was great, he intimated to them that there was MUCH WORK to do.

The truth of this appears from considering the vast multitudes of souls, every where around them, in a state of ignorance sin and death, who needed the blessings of the gospel and the labours of its ministers. The land of *Canaan* in our Lord's time was exceedingly populous. The Jews, the posterity of *Abraham*, here and in the neighbouring country, were (according to the divine promise) *like as the stars of heaven for multitude* *. And yet far more numerous were the inhabitants of the surrounding HEATHEN nations, who *sat in the dark region of the shadow of death*, among whom the apostles were also to exercise their ministry. Their commission was to *go into all nations, and preach the gospel to every creature*; and among others to the polite and learned in the renowned cities of *Greece* and *Rome*. How extensive a field was opened before them! and how arduous the task assigned them! Especially considering the various tempers and prejudices of those to whom they were sent, and the dreadful progress of iniquity among them. *The whole world lay in wickedness* †. And many of the vices of heathens prevailed, in a very enormous degree, even among God's professing people.

On much the same accounts may it still be said, *the harvest truly is great*. The habitable parts of our world are become exceeding populous. The sons and daughters of Adam are numerous as the

* Heb. xi. 12.

† 1 John v. 19.

corn in a fruitful field. And where-ever human beings are planted, the seeds of vice and misery are sown. It is truly lamentable to think what multitudes still sit in heathenish darkness, or are under the delusions of a vile impostor, and utterly ignorant of the way of salvation by Jesus Christ. But it is yet more deplorable to consider, what a large proportion of those who inhabit *christian* countries, evidently appear to be *without Christ*, and *enemies to him by wicked works*. There are many obscure, yea populous parts of this kingdom where but little even of the form of religion is kept up, and where the most shameful ignorance of the first principles of christianity prevails, so that *the people perish for lack of knowledge* *. And in other places, where religious knowledge is not in the lowest state, the dissoluteness of men's manners is almost incredible. Immoralities of almost all kinds prevail to such a degree as would have made some heathens blush, and those ordinances of the gospel which are the appointed means of salvation are neglected and despised. And as for those who are free from such gross iniquities, how many are there among them evidently strangers to *the power of godliness*, and at best but almost christians ! Now it is the office of christian ministers *to warn every man ; to teach every man ; to exhort and reprove ; to pray and beseech men ; to watch for souls as those that must give an account*, and to use every possible method in order to *convert sinners from the error of their ways* †. On considering these things, and at the

* Hosea, iv. 6.

† James v. 20.

same time reflecting upon the power of men's lusts, the strength of their prejudices against the means of reformation and salvation, and the *enmity of the carnal mind against God* and goodness, you will readily own *the harvest truly is great*, and cannot wonder if we adopt the language of the apostle, *who is sufficient for these things?* Especially when we take into consideration the awful and everlasting consequences of our ministry, and how short and precarious our time is of labouring for eternity. — But we are further to observe, that when our Lord pronounced the harvest to be great, he meant

2. That among the vast numbers of souls who needed the labours of his servants, there were **MANY DISPOSED TO RECEIVE them.**

The minds of many, by reading the old testament scriptures, by the preaching of *John* the Baptist, and by the fame of Christ which had spread far abroad, were prepared to hear the gospel of salvation, to accept the blessings, and comply with the requirements of it. Many discovered an earnest desire to attend the gospel ministry, and (as the evangelist speaks) *pressed into the kingdom*, so that they might fitly be compared to corn that is thoroughly ripe. This was evidently our Lord's idea in the passage already cited, in which, upon occasion of the readiness of the *Samaritans* to hear the gospel, he tells his disciples that *the fields were already white for the harvest*. During his own personal abode upon earth, there were promising appearances of success attending his labours and

those of his apostles. The ears of many were attentive to his heavenly doctrine, and the hearts of many open to receive it; insomuch that the chief priests and Pharisees were alarmed and said, *If we let him alone, all men will believe on him.* Before he left our world, that ancient prediction was in part accomplished, *Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power* *. But this was more especially verified afterwards, when the spirit was poured out on the apostles, when thousands were *pricked at the heart*, and brought to enquire, *What shall we do?* So that the wondering world might well ask in the language of astonishment, agreeably to the prophet's representation, *Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as doves to their windows* †?—And thanks be to God, we in the present day have both such opportunity and encouragement for preaching the gospel, that it may still be said, *the harvest is great.* With regard to OPPORTUNITY, the ministers of our own country, at the present time, enjoy far greater advantages, than Christ and his apostles did, who were violently and openly opposed by the Jewish rulers both in church and state, and by heathen princes, magistrates and priests. The blessings of liberty have long been enjoyed by us in as great an extent as was ever known. Ministers of all denominations (though some persecuting laws are still in force) through the liberal spirit of the times, may freely preach according to their consciences, and the people at all times may assemble to hear them, *none daring to make them*

* Psal. cx. 3.

† Isaiah lx. 8.

afraid. We as Dissenters enjoy this further advantage above our fore-fathers, that in consequence of a long toleration, or connivance, and some other circumstances, the prejudices of our brethren in the established church are in a great measure abated. It must also be further acknowledged, that, degenerate as the present times are, and sad as the neglect of divine institutions is, there are many disposed to attend them with seriousness, and ready to contribute to the support of them. Those ministers who discover a warm zeal for the salvation of souls (unless in some peculiarly unfavourable circumstances) seldom want an encouraging audience, and especially in their occasional services, in places where the means of grace have not been long, or are not statedly enjoyed. And the more serious and fervent their preaching is, the more numerous and attentive the audience is usually found to be. It is doubtless a good sign when people are willing to attend such preaching: to go to some distance, and to be at some expence, for the sake of it. But especially when they discover minds deeply affected with what they hear, and are brought to *ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherwards*. Then may it be said, in a spiritual sense, that *the vallies are covered over with corn*. Then have the gospel-labourers encouragement to *put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe* *. Such encouragement some among us actually have, and such may others expect, in a degree proportioned to the fervour of our prayers and the diligence of our endeavours after it.

* Rev. xiv. 15.

What need then is there of faithful laborious ministers, seeing there is so much for them to do, and such opportunity and encouragement for doing it! If the harvest be so great, it is desirable that the labourers should be *MANY*. But alas, our Lord's account of the number of them in his day is too applicable to our own, for

III. *The labourers are FEW.*

Considering the vast multitude of souls who need their assistance, and the difficulties which attend them in their work, the number of christian ministers is very inconsiderable. I speak not with reference to any particular denomination, but include all. There are many parishes in this kingdom that are not statedly supplied with a minister of any kind; and other places have but one, tho' large enough to furnish employment for several, were they ever so laborious. But alas, how many more are there who bear the character, than faithfully discharge the office, of gospel-ministers, so as to deserve the name of *Labourers*: who bear the highest titles and receive the largest pay, but *stand all the day idle*. Faithful labourers, such as the Lord himself owns as his, such as are duly qualified for his work, and employ themselves with prudence and diligence in it, with an ardent zeal to promote their master's honour, and the immortal welfare of mankind, are very rare. This is indeed a melancholy truth, which calls for the generous lamentation of every friend to religion and the souls of men. Think how deplorable it would

would be if, in the present season of the year*, the plentiful crops of grain should be suffered to rot upon the ground for want of hands to gather it in. How much more deplorable that immortal souls should perish in ignorance and vice for want of faithful ministers to instruct, reform and save them.

We as Protestant Dissenters have reason to lament, that the number of ministers among us is far short of what it was when our fathers made that noble sacrifice to christian liberty and the rights of conscience, which laid the foundation of our dissent. And Oh how much inferior are many of their sons of the present age in ability, devotion and zeal! The number of our ministers rather continues to decline, Many of our congregations are destitute, and are breaking up for want of suitable supplies, and the number of candidates for the ministry in our academies is not proportioned to the demands of our churches.

It may not be unprofitable to enquire into the reasons of this affecting state of things.—One doubtless is, the arduous nature of the ministerial office; the labour and self-denial which are requisite to become duly prepared for it, and to discharge it with honour and success. Most persons prefer more easy employments.—Another obvious reason is, the little encouragement to be found, from any worldly prospects, to undertake the office. Those who *seek great things for themselves on earth*, must not become preachers of the gospel,

* The beginning of Harvest.

especially

especially amongst Us; if they do, they are not likely to gain their end; nor indeed is it reasonable that they should.

They that preach the gospel, however, have a right to expect to live of the gospel. But this many in the present day are not able to do, partly through the poverty, or the smallness of their congregations, and partly (in too many cases) through the want of liberality in their hearers. This circumstance leads many to discourage their children from undertaking the ministry, and has occasioned some to leave it. How far either are vindicable we do not here enquire.—It is moreover certain that the unhappy divisions which have so frequently obtained among the Dissenters, and the want of candour towards each other, and towards their ministers, on account of some differences in opinion, hath contributed to deter some from designing, and others from pursuing, the work of the ministry amongst us, who were possessed of abilities which might have rendered them distinguished ornaments to the profession and extensively useful in it.—Another very discouraging circumstance in the present day is, the want of a discreet zeal, in many of our hearers, and a strange ignorance of their avowed principles. In consequence hereof they run after every new preacher of almost any denomination who has the name of a “gospel-preacher,” though in reality he has nothing but zeal, often nothing but noise to recommend him, or some other talent for making the thoughtless multitude gaze: Or who at best is qualified only

to awaken the most ignorant and prophane to a serious concern about religion, but not to establish and build up christians in knowledge, faith and holiness *. Thus they turn their backs upon their own more judicious and equally faithful ministers, who are destitute of the power of voice, or other not very meritorious qualifications for striking the passions and making themselves popular. It is not to be wondered at if these and some other circumstances should be found to operate in gradually lessening the number of regular Protestant Dissent-

* As the reader will naturally suppose the author here refers to the persons called *Methodists*, he thinks it necessary to say, in order to prevent the above passage from being misunderstood, that he is far from being an enemy to that body of people. He commends the zeal of their ministers, heartily wishes them success, as far as they preach the gospel and act agreeably to it, and rejoices in the appearances of it in the real conversion of souls to God. It must, however, be acknowledged by their judicious friends that there are many irregularities amongst them, that too many of their preachers answer the former part of the above description, and that the latter part of it may be applied to most. Good Mr. *Whitefield* was ready to own it. Let us rejoice if the ignorant and prophane, who either had not the means of information or conversion, or would not attend upon them, are brought by their preaching to a thoughtful concern about their everlasting interests, and let us encourage others of that character to attend it with the same view. But for members of regular churches to desert their own ministers in order to follow these, is highly preposterous, and is manifestly attended with many evil consequences to themselves, to their families, to the churches of which they are members, and to the Dissenting Interest; particularly in the view above-mentioned.

ing ministers, though they ought to be improved to very different ends.

Give me leave, as the close of the present head of discourse, to point out the improvement which should be made of the affecting truth which the text has led us to contemplate, in the following inferences. The first which I shall mention respects only ministers themselves.

1. If faithful labourers in the Lord's harvest are few, this should be improved, by all who are engaged in that important work, as a motive to unwearied diligence in it:

The fewer the hands are in a plentiful harvest, the more laborious and constant should the work-men be, especially as their business cannot be deferred, there being but a few weeks in the whole year in which it can be attended. A little delay, particularly in the most favourable weather, may be of fatal consequence. Thus it is in the gospel-harvest. May the Lord awaken the labourers in it to a due sense of the importance of their work, and in proportion as their number is small, may their diligence be great!

This consideration also suggests a reason why ministers should be ready, as opportunity offers, and watchful to *seek* opportunity, for extending their care and labour beyond the limits of their own congregations, and to concur in affording their assistance in places where there is no stated preacher, or none qualified or disposed to answer the great ends of preaching. It would be well if

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in some views we imitated the zeal of those whom we are too ready to despise:

2. Since the ministers of Christ are few, we may derive an argument from hence why their people should afford them all possible encouragement and assistance in their work.

Those who have a true regard for their ministers will not only provide them a decent support, endeavour to alleviate their burdens, and as much as possible remove discouragements out of their way, but will exert themselves to forward the success of their labours. And this, not merely a regard to them, but duty to Christ and love to their fellow immortals will surely dictate. Our work is far from being confined to the pulpit: There are many calls for attendance upon our people in private, and frequent occasions for personal counsel, reproof, caution, exhortation, consolation and prayer. The cases of the afflicted, and of young persons, in particular, require much private notice. Now since ministers are so few in comparison with the number of their hearers in general, (and few congregations, though large, can support more than one) it is next to impossible that they should themselves give that particular and close attention to every case in private which its importance requires, and which they could wish to give. They may therefore reasonably expect the members of their churches to *stir up the gift that is in them*, and become helpers together with them in their work; particularly in *visiting the sick, the widows and the*

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fatherless

fatherless in their affliction, which indeed is spoken of as an important branch of pure religion*. It is in a special manner the duty of the people to assist their ministers by the faithful performance of every part of FAMILY RELIGION; *commanding their children and their household after them to keep the ways of the Lord*; causing them to read the scriptures, catechising and instructing them in the great doctrines and duties of religion, cautioning them against every thing that would tend to the injury of their souls, exhorting them to, and encouraging them in, every thing that is good; reminding them of what they hear from the pulpit, and enforcing upon them a serious practical regard to it; praying with them and for them, and putting them upon praying for themselves. How happy would it be for the church, how happy for ministers, and how much less cause would there be to lament it that they are so few, if heads of families in general would thus officiate as priests in their own houses! — I will only add one other view in which, christians, we need and desire and demand your assistance; I mean what you find the apostle reminding the Corinthians of in these words, *you also helping together by PRAYER for us*†.

3. Since faithful laborious ministers are so few, we may infer what just occasion there is for lamenting the loss of any of them by death.

The more plenteous the harvest, and the fewer the labourers, the more are they needed, and the

* James i. 27.

† 2 Cor. i. 11.

worse can able hands be spared. When the righteous perish and the faithful fail it ought to be laid to heart. The death of every good man, but especially of every good minister, is a loss to the church and to the world. But the death of *A master in Israel*, one standing like *Samuel* appointed over the college of the prophets *; with prudence and indefatigable industry directing the studies of the sons of the prophets; by lectures of learning and devotion training them up for the service of the sanctuary; forming them by instruction and example to the character of judicious, evangelical, practical preachers of Christ; the death of such an one must be considered as a peculiarly heavy stroke upon the church of God. When *Elijah*, who had superintended the prophetic seminaries in *Israel*, came to visit the schools of the prophets at *Bethel* and *Jericho* just before his translation, the students there, the sons of the prophets, came to *Elisha* his assistant, and afterwards his successor, and said to him, *Knowest thou not that the Lord will take away thy master from thine head to-day* †? expressing the utmost consternation at the thought of so afflictive an event. A similar event has befallen one of the first of our schools, which the sons of the prophets there, and many of their brethren and fathers, have for some time had in painful expectation, who cannot but be deeply affected with the melancholy tidings of it. *Elisha* when asked the question whether he was aware of what was about to happen answered, *Yea, I know it: Hold your*

* 1 Sam. xix. 20.

† 2 Kings ii. 3.

peace. Our duty is undoubtedly the same. Under all the afflictive strokes of the almighty, his language to his creatures is, *Be still, and know that I am God**. But while in humble silence we own the wisdom and righteousness of that God in all his afflictive providences, we ought to feel them, and while we feel, to mourn. There is peculiar cause for lamentation in the present case, as the vacancy now made will, on account of many peculiar circumstances, be with great difficulty supplied. There are few who can think themselves qualified to fill it, and not many really are so. However, the loss of the wisest, the greatest, the best of men ought not to be so lamented, as if the interest of religion in the world depended upon them. The great head of the church needs not any particular instruments to carry on his great designs of providence or of grace. Though he uses instruments, he makes them what they are, and he who forms them for himself, and lays them aside when he pleases, can easily form others, and we may cheerfully hope he will. Let us rejoice in his all-sufficiency, grace and faithfulness, who ever lives, *the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever †*; believing that he will maintain his own cause, and can never be at a loss for means of doing it.

However, there is doubtless an important duty incumbent upon Us in regard to the use of means for the support of religion in the world, as well as for maintaining it in our own souls. I therefore add as a further head of improvement,

* Psal. xlv. 10.

† Heb. xiii. 8.

4. Since the faithful ministers of Christ are few, it becomes us to desire and endeavour to increase their number.

When we consider what multitudes of souls there are every where around us in a state of sin and death, and how fast they are hastening into the eternal world, where they will be beyond all hope of recovery, and when at the same time we think how few there are who seem in earnest to apprize them of their danger, and to shew them the way of salvation, well may we adopt the words of *Moses*, in reply to *Joshua*, who complained of *Eldad* and *Medad* for prophesying in the camp, *Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets! and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!* * Let us cultivate a compassionate concern for the souls of men, and do the utmost in our power that they may have the necessary means of conversion and salvation. This naturally brings me to consider

IV. The exhortation of our Lord to his disciples on that affecting view of things which we have been contemplating: *Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.* Let us here,

1. Attend a little to the view which our Saviour gives of the blessed God. He represents him as '*The Lord of the harvest.*'

The world, which is *the field*† in which immortal spirits grow up for eternity, is *his*. *The earth* is the

* Numb. xi. 29.

† Matt. xiii. 38.

Lord's and the fulness thereof, the world and all that dwell therein *. *All souls are his*; for he is *the father of spirits*. And as he causes the grain to grow upon the earth and makes it ready for the reaper's use, so he prepares the souls of men for the sickle of his word, and makes ready an harvest for the spiritual labourer. *The preparation of the heart of man is from the Lord* †. Those who are employed in the gospel vineyard are also his. He qualifies them for their work, and he calls them to it. In the text it is spoken of as his prerogative to *send forth labourers*. From him they receive their instructions, and from him are they to look for their reward. In a word, he has the disposal of every thing relating to this spiritual harvest, and he has the sole claim to the fruits of it.

This consideration, that God is the Lord of the harvest, should excite those who enter into it as labourers, to see that they have their commission and their instructions from him. It should serve to quicken and animate christian ministers in the discharge of their work, to recollect that they are the servants of the Lord, employed by him, *workers together with him*, and finally accountable to him. It should also be improved to comfort them amidst their manifold discouragements, the smallness of their number, the greatness of their work, their want of success; and also to cheer the minds of good men in general, when dejected on observing the sad declension of religion in our churches, and the want of faithful ministers. Since the harvest

* Psal. xcvi. 7.

† Prov. xvi. 1.

is the Lord's, we may chearfully look to him to provide labourers and to command success, while at the same time we exert ourselves, in the use of all proper means, to raise up a succession of them, and to revive the interest of true Christianity. To the discharge of this duty our Lord here exhorts us. *Pray ye that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.*—Let us now

2. Consider the import of this exhortation.

It is observable, that the word * rendered *send forth*, properly signifies *thrust out*: which implies that there is a backwardness in persons to engage in this arduous service. Some who seem to have talents for it are averse to it thro' indolence, or the love of the world, for which *Demas* forsook the service. Others thro' modesty and self-diffidence. When *Moses* was called forth to go on God's errand to *Pharaoh*, he pleaded to be excused, saying, *O my Lord, I am not eloquent, but am slow of speech and of a slow tongue.* In like manner the Prophet *Jeremiah*, *Alb Lord God, behold I cannot speak, for I am a child.* Those who are the most fit for the work, are often the most backward to engage in it, from a sense of its great difficulty and importance, and of their own insufficiency. It is needful for the Lord of the Harvest, to *thrust them out.*

Our Saviour's exhortation, to *pray*, that *he would* do so, though immediately addressed to his first disciples, we may properly consider as ad-

* Εὐκαλαῶν. So in Mat. ix. 38.

dressed to us ; for there seems to be no just ground for confining it to them, but the highest reason, from the considerations now suggested, for all the Ministers and the Disciples of Jesus to make it their own. We shall comport with the design of the exhortation, by attending to the following hints.

We should pray, that God would incline the hearts of more young persons, qualified by nature and by grace, on right views, and with the noblest ends, to devote themselves to this service ; that he would remove discouragements out of their way, and dispose their parents and friends to promote and cherish their inclination to it.

We should pray for those who are devoted to the Lord for the service of the sanctuary, that they may be duly qualified for it ; that they may be owned of God and sent by him : For as well may we be without ministers as without those that are of God's sending, since none but such can be supposed duly qualified for the work, or likely to do much good in it. It is a most desirable thing to have skilful and able *work-men, that need not to be ashamed* ; men of sound learning, sanctified by the grace of God. Persons who, having felt the power of the Gospel upon their own souls, will be earnestly desirous that their hearers may feel it too ; persons filled with zeal for God ; *willing to spend and to be spent* for the honour of their master, and the immortal welfare of their fellow-creatures. —For this end,

We should pray for a blessing upon the *schools of the prophets*, our universities and private seminaries, that those who preside over them may themselves be *taught of the Lord*, that so they may be *able to teach others also*, and aim not to train up *mere* scholars, (who are great curses to the Church) but *good Ministers of Jesus Christ*.—When any eminently qualified for that arduous trust are removed by death, it surely becomes the friends of religion to pray that God would provide others to fill their places, to maintain the honour and success of our public institutions for raising up a succession of Pastors after God's own heart, to feed his people with knowledge and understanding. Again

It behoves Christians fervently to pray for those who are actually engaged in the work of the ministry, that they may indeed approve themselves *Labourers*, sent forth of the Lord into his harvest. We have all of us, brethren, much need of your prayers in this view, and we earnestly solicit them. Pray that our ministerial furniture may be improved; that our love to Christ and the souls for whom he died may be increased; that our zeal for their conversion, edification and salvation may be enflamed. Pray that our minds may be supported and encouraged under all our difficulties and trials, and that we may be instrumental in turning many to righteousness, and in training up many sons for glory. If an inspired Apostle solicited the prayers of his Christian friends, how much more need have we to say, *Brethren pray for us*. Again,

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We should pray that God would have *compassion upon the multitudes* of our fellow-immortals *who are as sheep without a shepherd*: the many populous parts of this kingdom where the people are either wholly destitute of the means of grace, or enjoy them in but a small degree, that God would incline the hearts of some prudent and laborious work-men to enter among them, and open a way for their reception, *that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified.*

Finally we should pray, that God would send his Ministers into those large and populous parts of the earth, which are at present utter strangers to the Gospel-way of Salvation, that as the world is plentifully sown with immortal creatures, it may quickly yield a plentiful harvest unto Christ.

Let us all, Ministers and people, frequently and fervently unite in addressing such supplications as these to the throne of the divine mercy. But let us remember, it is not to be expected, that the most fervent prayers will avail in this case, or indeed in any other, unless they are accompanied with correspondent endeavours. If, while we ask of God to bring about any event, we neglect the natural means for obtaining it, we affront him and impose upon ourselves. The stronger our faith is in such cases, the greater is our presumption. Let us attend to this in the case now before us, and act accordingly. It is true, it is the prerogative of the great Lord of the harvest, to send forth labourers into it; but it is no more inconsistent with this to devise and encourage schemes for

for supplying the churches with useful Ministers, than it is in the husband-man, who is taught that it is God who *gives him corn**, and is required to ask of him his daily bread, to be diligent in plowing and sowing his field, or to seek out for labourers to reap and gather in the crop. That God, of whom are all things, usually works in the moral as well as in the natural world by the use of means adapted to his purposes, and employs his creatures as the instruments in executing his great designs. What he purposes to do, he commands them to *ask*, but never warrants them to expect he will answer those prayers, which are counteracted by their conduct.

Let Christians then exert themselves according to their respective abilities and opportunities for the welfare of the Church and the salvation of souls.

Let those who have children qualified by the gifts of nature, and who give good evidence that they are possessed of that grand qualification of all, *the grace of God* in the heart, encourage them to devote themselves to God in the service of his sanctuary. It is not to be wished that any should bring up their sons for the ministry contrary to their own inclination: this has sometimes been of very unhappy consequence both to themselves and the Church of God. But it must be owned, that the judicious use of parental influence sometimes inclines young persons to an employment which they would not otherwise chuse, and in

* Hof. ii. 8. Isa. lv. 10.

consequence of serious advice and due encouragement, that way of life becomes their own free choice which they otherwise would not have thought of, and to which they once were even averse. I fear something of this kind is sadly wanting among Dissenters in the present day; especially among those in affluent circumstances, who are the properest persons to bring up their children for the ministry. They look upon it as too mean an employment for *their* children, for whom they can provide much more to their worldly emolument in other callings. Nay, there are those (I am sorry to say it) who even discourage their sons from studying for the ministry, tho' they have discovered a strong inclination to it, on this very account. In consequence of this our Ministers are often taken from among the meanest of the people, and are entirely dependent upon their hearers; both which circumstances are attended with many obvious disadvantages, and contribute, especially with respect to the polite and opulent, to bring the ministry into contempt. But let such persons remember that they themselves are the chief causes of that contempt of which they complain, and that they have it in their power in a great measure to remove it. Let the wealthy among us, who have any concern for the honour and support of our interest, consider whether it be not incumbent upon them to devote their own offspring to the service of God in this important office, provided they discover, after some proper trial, a real inclination to it, and a due capacity for it.

It. Consider, your children would escape the principal inconveniencies and difficulties attending it, of a secular nature, by their independence. This office has indeed other discouragements, but its supports and its advantages are abundantly equal to them, yea far over-balance them. What station in life is without its difficulties? and why should we not be willing that ourselves and children should submit to some for the sake of Christ, as well as for the present world?—As for those persons who have a mean idea of the office itself, and think it would be a disgrace to their children and their families, it requires the utmost stretch of charity to think them Christians. Let them remember that the priestly office has always been held honourable in all civilized nations, and was anciently united to the royal dignity. Let them also consider, that a preacher of righteousness was a character by which the Lord of Angels thought himself honoured.

Let what has been said excite and encourage young persons of ability and piety chearfully to present themselves to God, to serve him in the Gospel of his Son. While you see many of your fellow-immortals in a state of ignorance, depravity, guilt and ruin, and observe how few there are to help them, let your eye pity them, and your best endeavours be exerted for their recovery. While the blessed God is enquiring, as it were, for Labourers to go into his Harvest, saying (to allude to Isaiah vi. 8.) *Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?* and one excuses himself for this reason

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and another for that, do you offer yourselves as volunteers in his service, and say with the Prophet, *Here am I, send me.*

Let those whom God has blessed with ability and opportunity, cheerfully contribute to the support of candidates for the sacred ministry, be ready to devise schemes and patronize such as are already laid, for the encouragement of those who are engaged in it, and for extending the benefit of their labours.—Finally, let Ministers attend to the great end of their office, and in order to fulfil it, *be instant in season and out of season*; and while their principal care is employed about the people of their more immediate charge, let them be ready to do good wherever opportunity offers, and studious of means to enlarge the sphere of their usefulness.

It is, Sirs, for want of feeling more of the power of religion in our own souls, that we both, Ministers and people, discover so little zeal in promoting it in others. The more we love Christ, the more studious and diligent shall we be in advancing his cause in the world. Let us endeavour more strongly to believe the great truths of the Gospel, and to feel their influence on our hearts, and then I apprehend we shall more easily perceive the force of what has now been suggested, and be more ready to pay a practical regard to it. Then shall we with greater fervour, and with greater consistency, offer the prayer which has been recommended. In order hereto, may He enable us all so to believe and so to feel! May the Lord of

the Harvest pour out upon his Ministers and people in general a spirit of grace and supplication, that they may with greater fervour unite in presenting this prayer to him, and be excited to greater zeal in desiring and endeavouring the accomplishment of it. “ Let the happy time,
 “ O Lord, soon come when both Ministers and
 “ people shall seek with greater diligence, not
 “ *their own things*, but *the things which are*
 “ *Jesus Christ’s*: When in consequence hereof many
 “ shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be en-
 “ creased: When the favour of the Redeemer’s
 “ name shall be diffused thro’ the earth, and unto
 “ Him, universally, shall the gathering of the
 “ people be! Then will thy people rejoice before
 “ thee according to the joy of harvest, and thy Mi-
 “ nisters, tho’ they may go forth weeping, bearing
 “ precious seed, shall doubtless come again rejoicing,
 “ bringing their sheaves with them. Amen! and
 “ Amen!”



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P O S T S C R I P T.

IN pursuance of the Author's leading design in the foregoing Discourse, the Revival of the Dissenting Interest, and the advancement of real religion as the best means in order thereto, he has ventured to submit to the consideration of the serious and judicious among the Dissenters, the following hints with respect to some expedients which he has often thought might be usefully adopted in order to so desirable an end.

One is, that the Dissenters should unite in supporting some able, prudent, and zealous Ministers in preaching the gospel in some of the darkest and most irreligious parts of this kingdom, where no regular societies are formed, or where the Interest is entirely or almost extinct; in some of which commodious places yet remain, the affecting monuments of a departed glory. A particular plan for the conducting of such a scheme must be matured by the united judgments of many. It may not be amiss however here to hold up to view one which was formed and executed in the last age, by a number of merchants in *London*, which may serve at once as a precedent and a pattern for that here proposed. *Dr. Calamy* gives the following brief account of it*: "It was their custom to maintain a minister for three years at one place; and if his ministry proved so acceptable to the people that they would maintain him afterwards, he still continued; if not, they maintained him in another place."

It is much to be wished that some of our young Ministers, upon leaving the Academy, (and especially those whose circumstances render them independent) would be content to spend a few years in some of those places, where the interest is sunk the lowest, in order to its revival. Such an attempt might in many views be useful to themselves; and their success, in raising drooping societies, would be more to their honour and lasting satisfaction than the acceptance they might meet with in large congregations. But since the demands of

* See *Nonconformist's Memorial*, Vol. II. p. 589.

our larger societies are so great, it is submitted to consideration, whether it might not be expedient to educate some serious young men of good abilities, on purpose to supply the smaller ones in the most retired situations, where learning and politeness would be no recommendations, and where persons possessed of them could not be reconciled to take up their abode.

It would contribute much to answer the ends proposed, if our opulent Dissenters, who have country houses, would consult their usefulness as well as their pleasure. How much might they promote both, if, when they fix their rural seats at a distance from a dissenting society, instead of conforming to a mode of worship they cannot approve, or what is worse, staying at home, they were to take a chaplain with them, to preach either in their houses, or in some convenient place fitted up for the purpose, and encourage their neighbours to give their attendance; who in many country places have but poor advantages for religion, and might be exceedingly thankful for such as these.

Another method which seems to promise great usefulness is, to encourage stated Ministers to unite in carrying on Lectures in the villages round about them, on the Lord's-day evenings, or on other occasions, as may be found most expedient, for insisting chiefly on the most important subjects of religion, in which all Christians are agreed, principally with a view to the great end of conversion*.

The present state of things among us seems to require some extraordinary steps to be taken. We have so long gone on in the same tract, that we seem by degrees to have sunk into that formality and indifference, the avoiding of which we often insist upon as a strong argument against *stated forms* in divine worship. There is the greater reason for such *extra* services, out of the ordinary seasons of worship, as it is chiefly by these that the *Methodists* make such great inroads upon us. While we wish them success, so far as they do real good, by *turning men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God*, we ought not to sit unmoved to see them found societies, as they too often do, in direct opposition to ours, and build them up by pulling our own to pieces. The most effectual way to pre-

* See *Baxter's Reformed Pastor* abridged, p. 215.

vent this is, not to exclaim against them but to imitate their zeal, which we may surely do without following their irregularities. We are exhorted to be *instant* not only *in season*, but also *out of season*. Never was this more necessary than in the present day. It was by following this advice, in the way now recommended, that the first Nonconformists had so much success: it is in a great measure for want of it that we have so little. Those of our brethren who have made the experiment, have generally found their occasional and extraordinary services abundantly more useful, in doing real good, than their stated labours at the usual hours on the Lord's-day. More hearers usually attend on such occasions; some who are greatly attached to the forms of the church, and (which is yet more desirable) many of the lower sort of people, who have not been used to frequent divine worship at all.

It is easy to foresee some objections which will be made to the above proposals; but it is apprehended they are chiefly such as a prudent management would soon remove, or a warm zeal for God would easily overcome.

Where any considerable EXPENCE would be incurred, which neither the minister nor the people could bear, and especially in supporting a stated preacher, as in the first scheme, let it be defrayed by A SOCIETY formed with this view. Among a number it would be inconsiderable. The Dissenters in *London* are indeed already at great charge in supporting the interest in the country. But many of them are able to bear a little more, and especially if they would retrench some expences which are not only unnecessary, but greatly injurious to themselves and their families, and to the interest of religion. What if young persons, who are not yet initiated into other societies, were to be put upon joining such an one as this, and were to be frugal in their other expences, in order to enable them to do good betimes?

But why should not large and opulent congregations in the *Country* contribute to the good of the general cause? As many of them send nothing to the *Funds* for supporting poor Ministers, (tho' much better able than many societies in *London*) it cannot be doubted but that, when properly applied to, they will raise generous contributions towards such a design as that now proposed.

It is much to be wished that persons of affluence, and especially those who have but small or no families, would think of the trust reposed in them; of the talents they have for public usefulness; of their obligations to improve them; of the account soon to be demanded of the manner in which they have done it; and how much nobler a satisfaction it will afford them another day, to have lived to the benefit of mankind, and *honoured the Lord with their substance*, than to have amassed large fortunes to be left to strangers, or even to their own children, who are seldom the happier for them, and who are often the more effectually ruined thereby.

It is also most highly desirable that the professed followers of Jesus in general, whether Ministers or private Christians, would seriously consider, as in the light of the great judgment day, their obligations to follow their Master in that leading and most amiable part of his character, his unbounded BENEVOLENCE, with reference to which it is said of him that *he went about continually doing good*.

If the Writer of this should appear to be too sanguine, and to have discovered any thing like an unbecoming forwardness, he hopes for the candour of those who know the employment in which he hath lately been engaged, and who have afforded him such ample encouragement in it—the republication of the Memoirs of Men to whose zealous endeavours the very being of our Societies is, under God, to be attributed, and whose activity and success were such, that one cannot be much conversant with their Writings or their Lives, without imbibing something of the same glorious enthusiasm.

If any thing more need to be said to shew the importance of the object here proposed, and to awaken our languid zeal to devise and execute some public scheme, that promises success—not to strengthen a party, but to promote the cause of real religion in the world, the Writer begs leave to conclude this address with earnestly recommending the serious perusal of

MR. ORTON'S Three Discourses on Christian Zeal, and
DR. FURNEAUX'S late Sermon preached before the Correspondent Board in London of the Society in Scotland for propagating Christian Knowledge, &c. entitled, *The Duty of Benevolence and a public Spirit*, on Rom. xiv. 7. *None of us liveth to himself*.

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